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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine in what order of preference beginning teachers join teacher organizations and the relationship of selected background characteristics, morale, recruitment activities, or administrative pressure with this preference. Questionnaires were mailed to elementary, junior high, and high school teachers completing their first year of teaching in five similar school systems. Of the 178 questionnaires returned, 46 percent reported joining neither teacher organization, 45 percent joined the National Education Association affiliate, and five percent joined the American Federation of Teachers group. In the two systems where bargaining elections had been held, beginning teachers tended to join the group in power. In comparing other factors, a significant relationship was found between recruitment activities and organizational choice. Teachers tended to join the organization with the most active recruitment program and of which their closest friend and most admired professional colleague were members. A significant difference was found between members and nonmembers on their perception of the principal's organizational preference. Although little overt pressure was reported, nearly twice as many members as nonmembers felt their principal preferred that they join the NEA affiliate. Further research is suggested on organizational and administrative pressure and peer influence. (RT)

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The Organizational Choice of Beginning Teachers in Districts with Competing NEA and AFT Affiliates

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Introduction

The socialization of teachers into the formal work organization and the adaptive mechanisms which are found in the teacher subculture have been discussed by many scholars utilizing frameworks from anthropology, sociology, and psychology.[2] In recent years, the phenomenon of competing militant teacher organizations has added a new dimension to the traditional problems which confront neophyte teachers.

Despite recurrent rumors of merger by the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) there seems to be little evidence that the competition for membership and concomitant power is diminishing. The few instances of actual mergers, such as occurred in Flint, Michigan in 1969 and which are currently receiving attention in Los Angeles and the State of Massachusetts, might be characterized, at this point in time, as largely local phenomena with little import on a national level. Neither organization is timid about applying pressures in the form of work stoppages and the similarities between the NEA and the AFT are more striking than the contrasts. Nevertheless, a stereotype still seems to exist which tends to picture the NEA as the more conservative of the two groups. Minor differences notwithstanding, the single, most important dissimilarity appears to be the AFT affiliation with the American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), a linkage which is anathema to the NEA. In sum, the prospects for

continued inter-organizational conflict seem inevitable, especially in districts where two affiliates are actively competing.[3]

The purpose of this study was to examine factors related to the beginning teacher's choice of organizational membership in school districts in which there were competing AFT and NEA affiliates. The particular questions posed by this study were:

(1) In what order of preference do beginning teachers join teacher organizations?

(2) What is the relationship between selected background characteristics of the beginning teacher and organizational choice?

(3) What is the relationship between morale and organizational choice?

(4) What is the relationship between organizational pressure (i.e., recruitment activities of local unions and associations) and membership?

(5) What is the relationship between administrative pressure (i.e., behavior of administrators perceived to be an attempt to influence the membership choice of beginning teachers) and membership?

Methodology

Five school systems were selected which met the following criteria: (1) Each system was located in a "bedroom" community outside a major eastern city. (2) There were local affiliates of both the NEA and AFT in each system. (3) Overt forms of teacher militancy and interorganizational competition such as picketing, demonstrations, bargaining elections, and work stoppages were reported in each system in the year prior to the study. (4) The systems had comparable salary schedules, facilities, and working conditions. (5) The districts were equivalent in terms of staff size. It was reasoned that the beginning teachers in

each of the five districts would be exposed to comparable stimuli with regard to the recruitment activity of local teacher organizations. Similarly, their employment would be within organizational contexts which followed closely-related bureaucratic patterns of operation.

A questionnaire was constructed and a pilot study undertaken. The test-retest technique was used to further evaluate the instrument. The final form of the questionnaire consisted of 55 fixed-alternative items and was mailed to 270 beginning teachers during the last month of their first full year of teaching. The sample was stratified to include elementary, junior high, and high school teachers.

One hundred and seventy eight teachers, or 66 per cent of the original mailing, returned usable questionnaires. Two-dimensional tables were constructed and chi-square was used to test for significance of differences between groups on each of the items of the questionnaire.

Findings and Implications

Organizational Preferences of Beginning Teachers

Approximately 46 per cent of the sample reported joining neither teacher organization during the first year of teaching. Forty-five per cent joined the NEA affiliate while only five per cent joined the AFT group. Four per cent reported membership in both the NEA and the AFT. Union (AFT) membership was largely confined to one district which had recently elected the AFT affiliate as the exclusive bargaining representative. Similarly, an overrepresentation of association (NEA) members was found in a district in which the NEA subgroup was the official spokesman for the teachers. The remaining three districts

were represented by joint teacher councils consisting, for the most part, of association officers. Thus, it was observed that, in the two systems where bargaining elections had been held, the beginning teachers tended to join the group in power.

Selected Background Characteristics

No significant differences were found (1) between union and association members or (2) between teachers who joined an organization and those who did not join either organization on any of the personal, educational, and socio-economic factors measured by the questionnaire. These factors included sex, age, marital status, teaching level, perceived social class, father's occupation, community of origin, type of undergraduate college attended, former student NEA membership, and labor union orientation. These findings disagree, somewhat, with those of Lowe[4] who found significant differences between union and association members on teaching level and sex. Lowe's study suggested that union members were largely found at the junior high level, while association members tended to be female elementary teachers. However, his sample was confined to one school system and included experienced, as well as, beginning teachers.

Some differences, although statistically insignificant, were discerned and might be of interest. For example, union members were equally divided by sex while NEA joiners were mostly women (66 per cent). In addition, union members tended to come from large cities while their association counterparts were evenly distributed as to community of origin -- i.e., rural, small city, and large city.

One interesting finding pertained to former membership in an undergraduate National Education Association student organization. Fifty-six per cent of those teachers reporting college membership in a student NEA subgroup continued a linkage during their initial year of teaching. It might be tentatively concluded that there is some retentivity value in student NEA chapters. This seems especially salient since the AFT does not have an equally effective opportunity to attract future teachers prior to their entry into actual teaching.

It had been hypothesized that beginning teachers whose backgrounds included a high labor orientation, as measured by previous membership in a union other than the AFT of self, spouse, or father, would tend to join the local teacher union significantly more often than those with no previous union history in their background. According to Bakke[5], family background or prior union experience are factors in union membership. A union tradition in a family often makes workers union sympathizers. The data in this study indicated that the organizational choice of teachers was not associated with their prior union background.

Morale and Job Satisfaction

This sample of beginning teachers could be described as generally quite satisfied and happy during their initial teaching experience. Morale was not related to organizational membership -- a finding which again conflicts with those of Lowe[6], who reported significant differences between NEA and AFT members on similar questions pertaining to morale, career decision, and overall satisfaction. His study showed that AFT members were significantly lower than NEA members on all factors pertaining to morale.

Recruitment Pressure by Competing Organizations

Questions eliciting information regarding various aspects of inter-organizational competition revealed significant differences between union and association members. Regardless of affiliation teachers tended to join that organization which they perceived as: (1) more interested in their membership; (2) recruiting more actively by personal contact; (3) distributing more literature; and (4) the group of which both their closest friend and "most admired professional colleague" was a member.

On the basis of the above, it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that high-powered campaigning "pays off" in terms of gaining membership. Similarly, one is struck by the realization that the influence of peers and social milieu seems to be of prime importance during the organizational selection process.

Nonmembers reported their friends also to be nonmembers. As might be expected unaffiliated teachers assumed a passive role in the inter-organizational competition. They rarely attended meetings of either group and generally perceived less recruitment pressure and activity than did association and union teachers. As stated earlier, this uncommitted group comprised 46 per cent of the sample and was seemingly removed from the struggle for membership. It would appear that the successful teacher organization must devise ways to tap this large bloc of potential recruits.

Administrative Pressure and Influence

A number of questions asked the subjects to recall behavior of administrators during the hiring process or throughout the school year

which might be interpreted as an attempt to influence the teacher's organizational decision. The data reveal no significant differences between union and association members, or between joiners and non-joiners, on these questions. Further inspection showed that very few beginning teachers, regardless of affiliation, reported any incidents related to administrative coercion. However, a small number of association members reported pro-association activity on the part of administrators.

A final question generated highly significant differences between members and nonmembers on their perception of the principal's organizational preference. Nearly twice as many members than nonmembers felt that their principal preferred that they join the NEA subgroup. Nonmembers tended to report that their principal did not care about their organizational choice. Only three individuals felt that their principal favored the AFT local chapter.

In sum, overt behavior of administrators to influence new staff members seemed to be a relatively isolated phenomenon of minor consequence. However, many beginning teachers, 45 per cent of the respondents, "felt" that there was, indeed, a pro-NEA preference on the part of the principal.

The foregoing does not support the charges of anti-union coercion and intimidation as set forth by Megel.[7] Neither are these findings entirely consistent with those reported by Moskow[8] in his survey of 150 Pennsylvania public school teachers, 48 per cent of whom reported administrative pressure to join an association.

It might be hypothesized that the existence of competing organizations tends to inhibit behavior by administrators which might be interpreted by either organization as coercive or prejudicial. Stated in

another way, the competition between local teacher organizations might generate a "watchdog" effect on administrative behavior pertaining to teacher intimidation if such a predisposition were present.

It might also be submitted that administrators in this study were more sophisticated in the area of employer-employee relationships than those in school districts where a high incidence of intimidation has been reported. The present study suggests that there seemed to be a factor in operation that resulted in the ascription of pro-association sentiment to the principal by many beginning teachers. Such an interpretation by teachers might conceivably affect their ultimate decisions regarding affiliation. However, an assumption of this nature must be viewed with suspicion pending further empirical evidence. Hence, it was concluded that the organizational choice of these beginning teachers was relatively free from the direct influence of superiors and remained largely an individual option. Indeed, beginning teachers, regardless of membership choice, tended to be more similar than dissimilar in terms of variables thought to be predictive of either NEA or AFT affiliation.

Concluding Statements

1. The notions of organizational and administrative pressure might form the basis for additional research, especially if data are collected in districts where hotly-contested membership campaigns are underway.

2. The influence of peers and social milieu on organizational membership would seem likely to be a fertile area for study.

3. The leadership role of administrators in the area of inter-organizational competition remains unclear at present. It seems that a neutral posture might be considered a "safe" adaptation. However, one must question whether there are viable alternative administrative styles which would be more meaningful during this period of projected conflict.

Notes

1. This paper is based on Stefan P. Krchniak, "Competing Teacher Organizations and the Beginning Teacher: A Study of Factors Related to the Collective Activity of Teachers" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1968).

2. See, for example, Willard Waller, The Sociology of Teaching (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1932); Ronald B. Corwin, A Sociology of Education (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965); Philip W. Jackson, Life in Classrooms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968); and Donald J. Willower, "The Teacher Subculture and Rites of Passage." (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Los Angeles, California, February, 1969).

3. Wesley A. Wildman and Charles A. Perry, "A Survey of Collective Activity Among Public School Teachers," Educational Administration Quarterly, II (Spring, 1966), p. 150.

4. William T. Lowe, "Who Joins Which Teachers' Group?" Teachers College Record, LXVI (April, 1965), pp. 615-616.

5. See E. Wight Bakke, "Why Workers Join Unions," Unions, Management and the Public, ed. by E. Wight Bakke and Clark Kerr (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1949), pp. 41-49.

6. Lowe, op. cit., pp. 615-616.

7. Carl Megel, "Teacher Conscription -- Bases of Association Membership," Teachers College Record, LXVI (October, 1964), pp. 7-17.

8. Michael Moskow, "Teacher Organizations: An Analysis of the Issues," Teachers College Record, LXVI (February, 1965), p. 453-463.